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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ADDIS ABABA 003725

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND INR

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [KPKO](#) [ET](#) [ER](#) [EE](#) [BORDER](#) [UNSC](#)

SUBJECT: UNITED NATIONS REQUESTS USG ASSISTANCE TO MONITOR
AND RESOLVE ERITREA-ETHIOPIA CRISIS

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 3711

[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 3624 (NOTAL)

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VICKI HUDDLESTON. REASON:
1.4 (D).

[1](#)1. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Post seeks Department's guidance in responding to the UN's request for satellite imagery of the Ethiopia-Eritrean border area, conveyed on October 26 by the UNMEE SRSG to Charge (see paragraph 8).

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY. Eritrea's restrictions on UNMEE operations within the TSZ have rendered it unable to monitor 800 km of the 1,100-km border with Ethiopia, prompting the UN to request USG satellite imagery while aerial surveillance is suspended. Concerns about UNMEE's reduced capabilities have prompted Ethiopia to announce it will move 30,000 additional troops toward the border. Jordan and India are threatening to withdraw their contingents, and are not likely to be replaced if withdrawn. In light of inaction by the AU, and Eritrea's non-recognition of UN envoys, UNMEE SRSG Amb. Legwaila appeals for "robust" action by the United States to prevent the outbreak of hostilities, including the appointment of a U.S. envoy and organizing a UNSC mission to the region. Legwaila also provided background on the disputed status of Badme, and why insisting on demarcation of the border (as delimited by the 2002 boundary commission's decision) would be tantamount to declaring Ethiopia the aggressor in 1998 hostilities. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (C) On October 26, Amb. Legwaila Joseph Legwaila, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE); Deputy SRSG Amb. Azouz Ennifar; and UNMEE Senior Political Affairs Officer Dr. Abdel-Kader Haireche briefed Charge and deputy P/E chief on the critical need for external intervention to defuse the growing crisis exacerbated by the Government of Eritrea's (GSE) October 4 decision to ban UNMEE helicopter flights within Eritrea.

REQUEST FOR USG SATELLITE IMAGERY OF BORDER AREA

[1](#)4. (C) Legwaila underscored that the most significant hurdle to UNMEE's operations was the GSE's new restrictions on movement within the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), all of which lay within Eritrean territory. Eritrea had also forbidden UNMEE from patrolling certain areas at night. "What is it that they don't want us to see at night?" Legwaila asked. Other restrictions on UNMEE's freedom of movement were not new. Legwaila noted that (unlike Ethiopia) Eritrea had never recognized UNMEE's authority to patrol 15-km-wide "adjacent areas" adjoining the TSZ, as such areas are not mentioned in the December 2000 cease-fire agreement. UNMEE monitored "adjacent areas" at the operational instructions of the UNSC, Legwaila said, to observe military movements into the TSZ.

[1](#)5. (C) With only 3,200 troops and military observers, aerial surveillance had been critical to UNMEE's ability to monitor the TSZ, Legwaila said, particularly as rotary-wing aircraft could patrol the entire border in a single day. UNMEE had used helicopters based at Assab, Berentu, and Asmara extensively. Without them, "tens of thousands" of peace-keepers would be needed to monitor the border adequately, and there was "nothing to stop" military forces from entering the TSZ and laying mines. Eritrea had already begun to move troops away from its border with Sudan, he said, even though Eritrean-Sudan relations remained strained following Sudan's withdrawal of its ambassador from Asmara. Legwaila observed that both Eritrea and Ethiopia now had more arms than at the outbreak of hostilities in 1998; Ethiopia was prepared to conduct aerial bombing of Asmara, as it had before. Legwaila said Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi had warned him that if war broke out, it would be an "Armageddon," and that Ethiopia would not be stopped by others.

[1](#)6. (C) Separately, Meles informed Charge on October 27 that Ethiopia was moving 30,000 reserve troops to the border with

Eritrea over the next ten days as a precautionary measure (septel), due to concerns about UNMEE's decreasing effectiveness.

17. (C) Legwaila confirmed recent public statements by Meles that more Eritrean militia were entering the TSZ, but noted that this was not a new development. Legwaila explained that UNMEE recognized that GSE troops often donned militia uniforms and were therefore indistinguishable from the military: a military commander in the western sector could reappear the next day as a militia commander elsewhere. He further observed that the 2000 cessation of hostilities agreement had called for local government officials, accompanied by police and militia, to enter the TSZ and take responsibility for law and order, as a precondition for the return of internally displaced persons.

18. (C) SRS Legwaila presented a demarche on behalf of UN SYG Annan, requesting that the USG provide satellite imagery to monitor the Ethiopian-Eritrean border. He reiterated that the GSE's flight restrictions had rendered UNMEE "60 per cent blind," and seriously impaired its ability to monitor the 1,100-km border (ref B). (NOTE: In several meetings with USG officials, including AF/RSA deputy director on October 24, senior UNMEE officials have detailed how the lack of aerial surveillance has created a 600-km "blind spot" in the Temporary Security Zone's central sector, flanked by two additional 100-km gaps in the eastern and western sectors respectively. END NOTE.) Legwaila noted that the USG, through Embassy Lusaka, had provided imagery to the UN in 1989 showing the entry of military forces into Namibia in contravention of UNSCR 435. Legwaila added that the UN had asked member states to provide additional resources to UNMEE in September, to compensate for the downsizing of UNMEE's troop strength.

TROOP-CONTRIBUTING COUNTRIES MAY WITHDRAW CONTINGENTS

19. (C) Legwaila reiterated previous warnings that "humiliation" of UN peace-keepers could compel Jordan and India to withdraw troops (comprising a majority of UNMEE), and that no troop-contributing country would likely replace them. He reported that inability to evacuate casualties by air had nearly caused the death of two peace-keepers from India and Kenya with a concussion and hernia, respectively, who had to be driven over rough roads for seven hours for medical treatment.

POLITICAL CRISIS REQUIRES USG INTERVENTION

110. (C) The international community considered the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission's (EEBC) 2002 decision "binding," but had failed to engage the parties in its implementation, Legwaila lamented. He said Algerian president Bouteflika, who had previously hosted December 2000 peace talks between the parties, was now deferring to the AU, which remained "in hibernation." Legwaila criticized the AU's priorities, noting that the AU had called for an October 31 extraordinary summit on UN reform while doing nothing to address an impending crisis involving two of its members. He attributed collective inaction to some who believed Eritrea was "on the side of the law," and to others "intimidated" by Ethiopia's strategic importance as a front-line state against terrorism. He warned, however, that conflict between the parties would cause instability in the Horn of Africa, creating "a fertile ground for Al-Qaida."

111. (C) Legwaila stated that following Ethiopia's demobilization of 150,000 troops before 2003, PM Meles had told him that Ethiopia's strategy was to isolate Eritrea and wait for it to implode economically. According to Legwaila, Meles's five-point peace proposal of November 2004 therefore represented a shift in policy, and reflected an attempt to engage Eritrea constructively in talks. Legwaila explained that Article 416 of the cease-fire agreement called for the UN to deal with the consequences of demarcation (e.g., in providing funds to resettle those in border areas that would be transferred among parties). Whereas the UN was originally envisioned as providing humanitarian or technical assistance, Ethiopia now sought to invoke the article to have the UN play a larger political role, Legwaila said. Eritrea, however, has explicitly rejected contacts with both the SRS and with UN Special Envoy for Ethiopia and Eritrea Lloyd Axworthy.

112. (C) Legwaila appealed for "robust" action by the United States. Specifically, he advocates:
-- UNSC permreps conducting an official mission to the region (as led by US PermRep Holbrooke in 1998);
-- intervention by parties serving as "witnesses" to the June 2000 agreement on cessation of hostilities, or the December 2000 peace agreement (i.e., the United States, or European Union);

-- the appointment of a U.S. (not UN) special envoy. Legwaila explicitly rejected arguments for a UN envoy, noting his own difficulties in seeing Isaias. Legwaila and other UNMEE officials also reported that the UN SYG received daily "hate mail" from Eritrea, rendering the appointment of any UN envoy ineffective.

13. (C) Legwaila dismissed the draft UNSCR distributed October 25 by Greece as "a useless resolution," warning that, if adopted, "Ethiopia will think you are adding insult to injury." Proposing a resolution "no different from previous ones," he said, fails to recognize the severity of the current crisis. He also dismissed proposals for a comprehensive conference on the Horn of Africa (modeled after the UN/AU's International Conference on the Great Lakes), saying it would avoid the central issue: Ethiopian and Eritrean disagreement over the status of the boundary commission's 2002 decision. He referred to the UN SYG's October 25 letter to the UNSC (S/2005/668), which appeals for UNSC action to avert "another round of devastating hostilities."

DISPUTED STATUS OF BADME STALEMATES DEMARCATION

14. (SBU) Legwaila, who has served as UNMEE SRSG for five years, detailed how both Ethiopia and Eritrea had initially committed to accept any decision by the EEBC, at December 2000 cease-fire talks in Algiers. Upon the announcement of the EEBC's decision in April 2002, Ethiopia's foreign minister hosted a celebration and issued a statement hailing the decision as a victory for both parties; however, Ethiopia had not realized that Badame had been awarded to Eritrea. The reason for this is the the EEBC did not identify Badame so it took sometime for the experts to determine to whom Badame had been given. Legwaila observed that delimitation of the border (i.e., determining where it lies) was complete, whereas demarcation (i.e., placing physical markers) was stalemated. Delimitation of the border had been conducted professionally and impartially, Legwaila said, through an Asmara-based chief surveyor armed with GPS equipment and assistance from New Zealand experts, and with aerial mapping conducted by a Swedish company. Demarcation would reflect the boundaries determined by delimitation -- there would be very little change, e.g. Badame would remain in Eritrea.

15. (C) In an independent effort to determine the status of Badme, Legwaila said that UNMEE had examined archives and concluded that until 1971, elections in Badme had actually been conducted under the administration of Tigray (i.e., in Ethiopia). The OAU had confirmed this. Legwaila noted that UNMEE had not/not provided this finding to Ethiopia or Eritrea, for fear of further inflaming the dispute. EEBC had found that Ethiopian administration of Badame was not an effective argument for giving it to Ethiopia. Out of 2,700 residents in Badme after the war, only 300 were Eritrean, Legwaila said, but he acknowledged that Ethiopian troops had driven many Eritreans out of Badme.

16. (C) The eastern sector of the border area (once fully demined) could be demarcated, Legwaila said, as UNMEE has a map of pillar sites accepted by both parties. However, Ethiopia's general objection to demarcation lies partially in the August 2003 demarcation directives, Legwaila explained, which instruct surveyors to confirm the EEBC's delimitation of the border. Specifically, an instruction for surveyors to confirm a line between "point 9 and point 6" would serve to have them reaffirm the EEBC's decision that places Badme on the Eritrean side. Ethiopia cannot accept Badme as Eritrean territory, Legwaila explained, as doing so would compel Ethiopia to recognize that it was the aggressor when entering Badme during 1998 hostilities.

19. (C) COMMENT: UNMEE officials expressed strong concerns about their lack of ability both to monitor the border and pleaded for aerial/satellite maps that would show troop locations and encourage us to name a Special US - not UN -- envoy. END COMMENT.
HUDDLESTON